

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, Members of the Subcommittee:

Minnesota residents deserve a replacement for the existing, outdated lift bridge over the St. Croix River connecting Stillwater, MN to western Wisconsin. I strongly support a fiscally responsible, appropriately-scaled transportation solution for the St. Croix River crossing in Stillwater. There is consensus that a new bridge is needed. However, there is intense debate and controversy over the specific design and overall cost of the proposed replacement bridge that H.R. 850 would permit. Therefore, this legislation can only be described as a stalking horse for an excessively expensive mega-bridge to be built only six miles from the existing eight lane Interstate-94 St. Croix River crossing.

While this debate is new to most Members of Congress, it is a debate that I have been involved in throughout my twenty-five year career in public service. In fact, the St. Croix crossing has been discussed locally for thirty years. During that period, numerous bridge replacement proposals have come and gone. Be assured, passage of H.R. 850 will not end debate or controversy over this proposed St. Croix crossing.

Irrespective of the bridge proposal in question, this Committee should reject H.R. 850 as an unprecedented assault on one of the most successful laws to protect America's natural treasures. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act preserves the nation's finest rivers for future generations. The Act protects 11,000 miles of 166 rivers in 38 states and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. Inclusion in this system is a highly selective distinction: protected rivers amount to one quarter of one percent of America's rivers. The St. Croix is the only river in Minnesota protected under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and gained this protection only after enormous effort from leaders such as former-U.S. Senator and Vice-President Walter Mondale.

Since the Act was passed in 1968, only extremely rare modifications have been granted by Congress. Passage of H.R. 850 would set a new, dangerously low standard for granting exemptions to the Wild and Scenic River Act that threatens every mile of every protected river in this national system.

The legislation under review today capriciously ignores the legacy of stewardship that millions of Americans enjoy today because of the law. H.R. 850 uses only 41 words to end over 40 years of federal protection for the St. Croix River. Regretfully, the effect of this legislation would be far

less economical than its language. This legislation would "deem" a \$700 million bridge over the St. Croix River to be consistent with the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. But in October 2010, after careful review, the National Park Service determined this specific bridge proposal was not consistent with the Act. H.R. 850 simply disregards the Park Service finding and states fiction as fact.

If Congress were to take the extraordinary step of granting an exemption to the Wild and Scenic River Act, the bridge proposed in H.R. 850 is not deserving of the precedent. This \$700 million bridge proposal is excessively expensive and would likely impose huge unfunded costs on the communities I represent.

Following the 2007 collapse of the Interstate 35 Bridge over the Mississippi River in

Minneapolis, a new state-of-the art bridge was constructed in record time for \$260 million (this figure includes a \$27 million contractor bonus for early completion). The bridge H.R. 850 enables to be built would cost taxpayers nearly three times as much the Interstate 35W Bridge, but serve only a fraction of the traffic. (Currently, around 18,000 vehicles cross the St. Croix River in Stillwater each day.) In this time of record deficits at the federal, state and local level, elected leaders must carefully consider the value of every investment. The bridge in H.R. 850 fails every common-sense test of taxpayer value.

Closer inspection of the proposed St. Croix Bridge reveals the true costs of the project may be much higher. There has been little attention paid to the traffic congestion that a new interstate-style bridge in Stillwater would add to the State Highway 36 corridor, including the cities of Oakdale, Maplewood, Mahtomedi, Roseville and North St. Paul. If there is enough traffic projected to justify building a bridge that costs nearly three times as much as the new Interstate 35W Bridge in Minneapolis then the communities along State Highway 36 should expect to be overrun with thousands more semi-trucks, buses, and daily commuters. Expanding State Highway 36 to accommodate an interstate-style bridge in Stillwater could raise the true cost of the mega-bridge project close to one billion dollars. Local elected officials from communities along State Highway 36 are raising concerns over the unfunded costs that H.R. 850 could impose on their taxpayers.

The full cost of the bridge proposed in H.R. 850 is unknown and the value of this public investment is deeply in doubt. Thankfully, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is forcing a closer review of this proposal. The Act is safeguarding the environmental integrity of the St. Croix

River and also protecting taxpayers from wasteful government spending. Granting an exemption to the Wild and Scenic River Act would be nothing short of fiscally reckless and a violation of the principle of local control.

It is possible to build a new bridge that meets the requirements of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, solves the long-standing transportation problem in Stillwater, and guarantees state and federal taxpayers a responsible return on their investment. I strongly support construction of a bridge that satisfies these reasonable expectations. My experience – and plain Minnesota common sense - suggests the fastest path to a new bridge is the path of consensus and fiscal responsibility. The Interstate-35W Bridge over the Mississippi River in Minneapolis is proof that Minnesota can build a new bridge in record time when there's community consensus around a sensible plan. An affordable St. Croix bridge could be designed and constructed long before the interstate-style bridge proposal and offer taxpayers much greater value.

I strongly urge Members of this Committee to support fiscal responsibility and environmental protection and oppose H.R. 850.

Mr. Chair, I request permission to insert the attached letter addressed to the Committee from Maplewood, Minnesota Mayor Will Rossbach into the hearing record.

May 2, 2011

To Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources,

I am writing to ask your consideration of the difficulties which will be created for the local government units which lie west of the cities of Stillwater and Oak Park Heights along the Highway 36 corridor if the current proposal for a new freeway type bridge is approved as an individual improvement and not as a regional project.

I want to be clear that a new bridge is absolutely necessary to cross the St. Croix River in the Stillwater, Oak Park Heights area. The existing bridge is in a condition which should have warranted its closure years ago and only is still in use due to the lack of ability to find common

ground for an alternative. The current bridge rating is below the rating of the Interstate 35 Bridge when it collapsed into the Mississippi River.

This being understood if a new bridge is approved without consideration of the impacts that will be had by all of the communities which share the Hwy 36 corridor the problems which are currently being experienced at the river will simply be transferred to the West and will create unnecessary burdens for those communities.

The Highway 36 corridor is currently operating at or near capacity and the existing bridge carries 18000 vehicles per day. The 2030 projections for a new bridge indicate that approximately 30,000 additional trips will be generated in the corridor which passes through the communities which lie to the West of the area. There is not any plan in place at this time to deal with the additional traffic which will be generated in the corridor without a new bridge let alone with the addition of the additional traffic which a new bridge would create. This situation on a regional basis needs to be considered with the understanding that there are no approved mass transit corridors anywhere in the region which could be viewed as a means to help to reduce the future flow of traffic in the Hwy. 36 corridor.

The current corridor is not currently at, nor is it currently planned, to have improvements constructed to bring it up to freeway standards in the 2030 planning period. Instead it is a corridor with limited lane volume restricted by several bridges and right of way which uses semaphores as traffic control devices a numerous intersections along its route.

The cost that is currently being contemplated for the bridge is to me unbelievable. In the City of Maplewood we have been attempting to find funding to eliminate one of the existing semaphores which would be a project that would help to enhance traffic flow that is currently backed up by the intersection control for miles during rush hour, and have not to date been able to secure the 5 to 6 million dollars we need to supplement our funding to proceed with the project. It would be a poor use of funds to dedicate close to 700 million dollars to a bridge that would create lack of capacity all along the corridor it is intended to serve. A more reasoned approach would be to construct a bridge which would be sized to accommodate the current traffic flow along with the reduced projections which would be generated by a properly scaled bridge and at the same time make the improvements needed to provide a fully functioning corridor.

You have an opportunity before you to resolve a dispute that has been ongoing for 20 to 30

years and desperately needs to have a solution, I urge you to find that solution but do so in a way that creates a fully functional traffic corridor and not waste such a large amount of funds over building one part of the corridor while creating numerous new problems along the entire length of the remaining corridor.

Respectfully submitted,

Will Rossbach

Mayor City of Maplewood